

Staff Sgts. John Garcia and Mike Ybarr, 612th Air Communications Squadron, stack an empty transit case to a pallet. The Airmen were in Columbia to support the Global War on Terror and to assist with counter-drug operations.

Courtesy photo

ON LINE, ON TIME

Communicators bring the fight to terrorists, drug lords in South America

By 1st Lt. Ron Reidel

612th Air Communications Squadron

DAVIS MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. — Thirteen members of the 612th Air Communications Squadron deployed to Apiay, Colombia, to support Colombian

forces in the fight against terrorism and counter-drug operations.

These U.S. Southern Command Air Forces Airmen were tasked to provide secure and non-secure voice, data and reach-back services to the Airmen of the 474th Expeditionary Operational Support Squadron stationed in Apiay. These critical services enable the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance community to quickly process, exploit and disseminate information to national agencies and ultimately to the warfighter on the ground.

"Setting up these services required some creativity and hard work for Airmen back home and the deployed Airmen," said Capt. Sean Beall, 612th ACOMS. "Providing support to the forward-deployed unit required planners at home to design an architecture based on the needs of the customers. The architecture required a forward connection at Apiay and a reach-back site at home — a first for 612th ACOMS."

To ensure mission success, ACOMS programmed, configured and tested the Theater Deployable Communications/Integrated Communications Access Package equipment at Davis Monthan, said Tech. Sgt. Dan Vaughn, 612th ACOMS. "After successfully testing the equipment, the 18,000-pound final package including TDC-ICAP equipment, computers, printers, phones, satellite earth terminal,

Iridium satellite phones, land mobile radios and spares kits made its way to Colombia."

Despite several roadblocks from power issues, modifying the architecture, working around trees and buildings, contracting support to running fiber optic lines and finally repositioning the satellite terminal, the team adapted to the situation and set up its equipment in Apiay within 48 hours.

The Apiay network became an extension of Davis Monthan's infrastructure by enabling the use of its boundary protection and e-mail gateway. This approach reduced the forward footprint by deploying less equipment and fewer people. Due to the efforts of the 612th ACOMS Airmen to provide these services to the warfighter in a critical and timesensitive matter, the Airmen of USSOUTHAF are supporting the war on terrorism and counter-drug operations, while establishing a first of its kind communications link, living up to the squadron motto "on line, on time."